0

Posted by u/SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

One last Sidewalk Toronto AMA: Ask us anything about the partnership proposal and business model (Aug 27, 1-2 PM).

Discussion

Released in June after 18 months of planning work and public input, our *Toronto Tomorrow* proposal outlines a new approach for inclusive growth along the city's eastern waterfront.

On **Tuesday, August 27, from 1-2 p.m.**, John Brodhead (Director of Policy and Strategy) and Steven Turell (Associate Director of Development) will answer your questions about the partnership proposal and business model, joined by Editorial Director Eric Jaffe (lead writer for the proposal).

The partnership proposal aims to support public-sector objectives around affordability, sustainability, and economic opportunity, with the potential to generate 44,000 jobs and $14.2 billion in annual GDP by 2040. The proposal recognizes the need for a strong central role of government and envisions Sidewalk Labs serving as lead developer (with local partners) of Quayside and Villiers West to prove out the innovative development approach.

Additionally, Sidewalk proposes to advise on innovation planning, design, and implementation; deploy limited urban innovations; and provide optional financing of critical infrastructure (such as light rail).

In aggregate, Sidewalk Labs and its partners propose to provide up to $1.3 billion in funding and financing. Sidewalk's business model includes revenue from traditional real estate development, urban innovations (sharing profits with the public sector in certain cases), and interest on the optional infrastructure financing (if used). This business model does not involve personal data; we've committed not to sell personal information or use it for ads.

You can read more about the proposed partnership here. We look forward to answering your questions!

Proof: https://twitter.com/sidewalklabs/status/1166045093264011265

You can read previous AMAs on the overall project, digital governance, affordable housing, sustainable energy and transport, and the Quayside plans and public realm here.

The AMA sessions are an opportunity for Sidewalk Labs to answer questions and clarify aspects of our proposal — but they aren't part of Waterfront Toronto's public consultation process. You can read more about that process here.

[UPDATE 2:05 PM - Thanks all. Appreciate all the questions today -- as well as everyone who has contributed to these conversations the past 6 weeks!]

43 Comments Share Save Hide Report 46% Upvoted

This thread is archived
New comments cannot be posted and votes cannot be cast

SORT BY **BEST**

Comment removed by moderator 1 year ago More than 3 children

CanadianKidz90 1 year ago

Question for Steven - as someone who doesn't even live in our city, why do you think you should have a say over how it is built and developed?

17 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(Steven here.) It's true I'm based in New York. Of course, we all work very closely with our colleagues based in Toronto. We now have a staff of more than 30 people based at our Toronto headquarters of 307 Lake Shore Blvd East. That's a big share of our company, which is still a fairly small startup of only about 100 people.

(John here). As we've answered in other AMAs, our Toronto-based staff includes urban planners and former public servants (like myself) with years of experience working on major city projects, including Toronto's West Don Lands and East Bayfront developments, the Bentway park beneath the Gardiner Expressway, the Evergreen Brick Works site, the Eglinton Crosstown rapid transit line, and many others.

In developing our *Toronto Tomorrow* proposal, we also worked closely with more than 100 local firms on the research, engineering, and design work, including PARTISANS, RWDI, urbanMetrics, and many others.

We have an amazing and experienced local team and have worked with tens of thousands of Torontonians directly and with expert local organizations to develop our plan. This plan was developed by Canadians -- in partnership with folks all over the globe -- to get the best ideas that work for Toronto.

3 Share Report Save

andechs 1 year ago

Why do we need Sidewalk Labs to enable affordability in development in the city? If this was a value we cared about, this could be handled by funding/zoning from the municipality or the province.

Is the model you're proposing "we'll be more effective since we will be unaccountable to voters"?

8 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

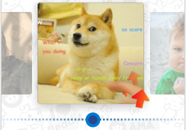
r/toronto

News, People, Places, Events, Articles, and Discussions on Toronto; Canada's Business and Financial capital, and the Provincial capital of Ontario.

347k	3.0k
Torontonians	Online

Created May 27, 2008

Join



TOP POSTS AUGUST 26TH 2019

TOP POSTS OF AUGUST, 2019

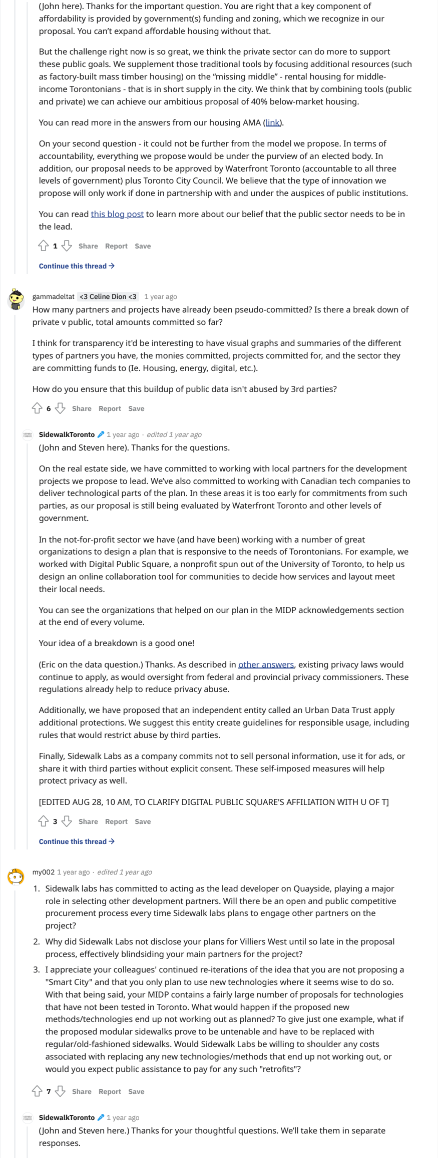
TOP POSTS 2019

Help
Reddit App
Reddit Coins
Reddit Premium
Reddit Gifts

About
Careers
Press
Advertise
Blog
Terms
Content Policy
Privacy Policy
Mod Policy

Reddit Inc © 2021. All rights reserved

Back to Top



(John here). Thanks for the important question. You are right that a key component of affordability is provided by government(s) funding and zoning, which we recognize in our proposal. You can't expand affordable housing without that.

But the challenge right now is so great, we think the private sector can do more to support these public goals. We supplement those traditional tools by focusing additional resources (such as factory-built mass timber housing) on the "missing middle" - rental housing for middle-income Torontonians - that is in short supply in the city. We think that by combining tools (public and private) we can achieve our ambitious proposal of 40% below-market housing.

You can read more in the answers from our housing AMA (link).

On your second question - it could not be further from the model we propose. In terms of accountability, everything we propose would be under the purview of an elected body. In addition, our proposal needs to be approved by Waterfront Toronto (accountable to all three levels of government) plus Toronto City Council. We believe that the type of innovation we propose will only work if done in partnership with and under the auspices of public institutions.

You can read this blog post to learn more about our belief that the public sector needs to be in the lead.

Continue this thread →

gammadeltat <3 Celine Dion <3 1 year ago

How many partners and projects have already been pseudo-committed? Is there a break down of private v public, total amounts committed so far?

I think for transparency it'd be interesting to have visual graphs and summaries of the different types of partners you have, the monies committed, projects committed for, and the sector they are committing funds to (Ie. Housing, energy, digital, etc.).

How do you ensure that this buildup of public data isn't abused by 3rd parties?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago · *edited 1 year ago*

(John and Steven here). Thanks for the questions.

On the real estate side, we have committed to working with local partners for the development projects we propose to lead. We've also committed to working with Canadian tech companies to deliver technological parts of the plan. In these areas it is too early for commitments from such parties, as our proposal is still being evaluated by Waterfront Toronto and other levels of government.

In the not-for-profit sector we have (and have been) working with a number of great organizations to design a plan that is responsive to the needs of Torontonians. For example, we worked with Digital Public Square, a nonprofit spun out of the University of Toronto, to help us design an online collaboration tool for communities to decide how services and layout meet their local needs.

You can see the organizations that helped on our plan in the MIDP acknowledgements section at the end of every volume.

Your idea of a breakdown is a good one!

(Eric on the data question.) Thanks. As described in other answers, existing privacy laws would continue to apply, as would oversight from federal and provincial privacy commissioners. These regulations already help to reduce privacy abuse.

Additionally, we have proposed that an independent entity called an Urban Data Trust apply additional protections. We suggest this entity create guidelines for responsible usage, including rules that would restrict abuse by third parties.

Finally, Sidewalk Labs as a company commits not to sell personal information, use it for ads, or share it with third parties without explicit consent. These self-imposed measures will help protect privacy as well.

[EDITED AUG 28, 10 AM, TO CLARIFY DIGITAL PUBLIC SQUARE'S AFFILIATION WITH U OF T]

Continue this thread →

my002 1 year ago · *edited 1 year ago*

1. Sidewalk labs has committed to acting as the lead developer on Quayside, playing a major role in selecting other development partners. Will there be an open and public competitive procurement process every time Sidewalk labs plans to engage other partners on the project?
2. Why did Sidewalk Labs not disclose your plans for Villiers West until so late in the proposal process, effectively blindsiding your main partners for the project?
3. I appreciate your colleagues' continued re-iterations of the idea that you are not proposing a "Smart City" and that you only plan to use new technologies where it seems wise to do so. With that being said, your MIDP contains a fairly large number of proposals for technologies that have not been tested in Toronto. What would happen if the proposed new methods/technologies end up not working out as planned? To give just one example, what if the proposed modular sidewalks prove to be untenable and have to be replaced with regular/old-fashioned sidewalks. Would Sidewalk Labs be willing to shoulder any costs associated with replacing any new technologies/methods that end up not working out, or would you expect public assistance to pay for any such "retrofits"?

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(John and Steven here.) Thanks for your thoughtful questions. We'll take them in separate responses.

On 1: While we have proposed to lead real estate development in Quayside and Villiers West, we have committed to doing so with local development partners. The process for that is something we're continuing to discuss with Waterfront Toronto, and we have always committed to being transparent about who those partners are. For the remainder of the eastern waterfront, Sidewalk Labs proposes to have no role in real estate development, nor in the procurement process to select real estate developers.

3 Share Report Save

Continue this thread →

itimetravelwell New Toronto 1 year ago

Of the jobs numbers you listed, how much of that will be for people that live here versus those you bring in?

And why do your words get dicey every time someone from sidewalk talks about your plans for our data?

Can we get an ELI5 for what your plans are exactly for our data, or what you plan on doing with it if you are still going to collected it but are promising not to sell it?

12 Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

Thanks for your questions.

(Steven on the first.) The jobs figures we present were estimated by the Toronto-based economic firm urbanMetrics (report link here). They found that, based on our plans, there would be up to 44,000 new direct jobs created across the full project geography -- jobs that would cut across all education and skill levels, from teachers to doctors to shop clerks to software engineers. Those are not jobs “we” would bring in, as Sidewalk Labs. They are jobs that all the companies and businesses locating in these new neighbourhoods would create, based on plans for an affordable live-work development with a mix of residences, offices, retailers, and community spaces.

The idea is for these companies and businesses to serve as a new economic engine for Toronto and Canada, so we’d hope that they would create job opportunities for local residents and workers. urbanMetrics estimates that our proposal would generate $14.2 billion a year for the Canadian economy (in GDP) by the year 2040.

(Eric on the other questions.) I’ll try to un-dicify the data plans as best I can.

You may not realize it, but city governments (and the private companies they often hire) use data everyday to help achieve public goals. They collect information on travel patterns to improve traffic signal timings and transit usage to improve streetcar options. They collect information on energy use to help reduce carbon footprint. They collect information on development uses (i.e. offices, homes) to ensure public safety and reduce nuisances like noise pollution.

We’ve proposed a plan that also includes digital (and non-digital) innovations to help achieve public goals established by Waterfront Toronto around affordability, sustainability, mobility, and economic opportunity. Most of these digital services do not rely on personal information; instead, they would use non-personal or population-level data around things like traffic patterns, energy use, stormwater levels, building codes, infrastructure maintenance, etc.

Existing privacy laws (which mainly focus on personal information) would still apply to these proposed services. But to further protect the privacy of this data and ensure it gets put towards the public good, we also propose that an independent entity called the Urban Data Trust approve all uses or collection of data for these services.

You can find a list of our proposed list of digital innovations for the project -- along with the purpose and the types of data they would collect -- on Pages 444-447 of the Digital Innovation chapter (link). Hope this helps.

You can also read more in the previous AMAs on digital governance (link) and the public realm (link).

1 Share Report Save

toronto2025 1 year ago

Why won’t you just play within the boundaries that were set at the outset of this process? Why are you trying to do city building things at tech speed? Fuck guys, you’re shitting all over your own feet.

22 Share Report Save

teedotgym 9 points · 1 year ago 0 children

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(John here.) Thanks for the question. Waterfront Toronto’s 2017 Request for Proposals clearly states that while the first focus is Quayside, we should propose things that go beyond Quayside in the eastern waterfront (link) - as did the Plan Development Agreement we signed last summer with Waterfront Toronto (link).

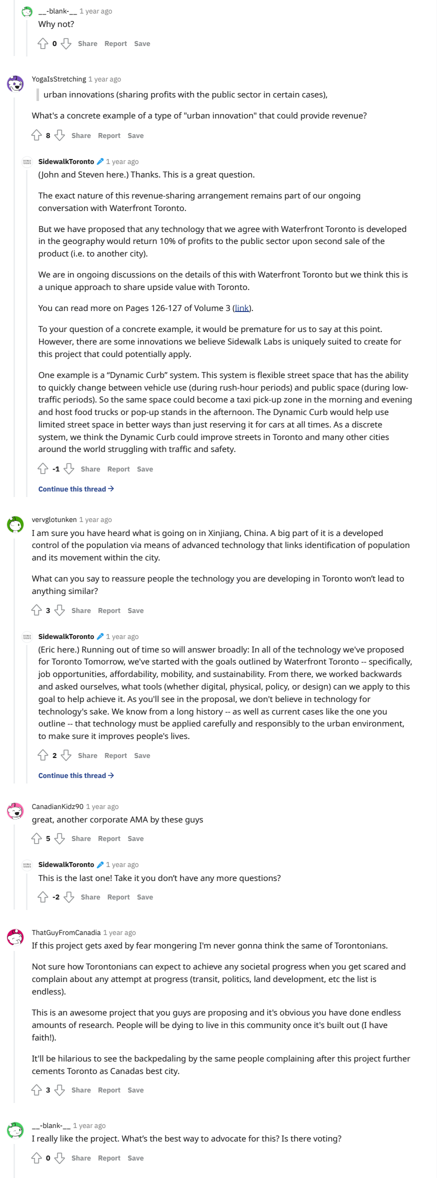
In this case, we propose 12 acres at Quayside, then an additional 18 acres at Villiers West. To give some perspective, that is less than 7% of the eastern waterfront. The Villiers West parcel in particular is critical to achieving the outcomes set by Waterfront Toronto - in particular those around economic development.

The idea at Villiers West is to create an urban innovation campus that would include Google’s new Canadian Headquarters and a new Urban Innovation Institute with local partners - which will create thousands of new jobs at all income levels.

Waterfront Toronto and the City of Toronto have the opportunity to review and decide whether they think this proposal is worth pursuing - but we can only hit our outcomes by including Villiers West in addition to Quayside, whether that is affordable housing, climate-positive development, sustainable mobility, and economic development and job creation.

1 Share Report Save

Continue this thread →



__-blank-__ 1 year ago

Why not?

⇧ 0 ⇩ Share Report Save

YogaIsStretching 1 year ago

> urban innovations (sharing profits with the public sector in certain cases),

What's a concrete example of a type of "urban innovation" that could provide revenue?

⇧ 8 ⇩ Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(John and Steven here.) Thanks. This is a great question.

The exact nature of this revenue-sharing arrangement remains part of our ongoing conversation with Waterfront Toronto.

But we have proposed that any technology that we agree with Waterfront Toronto is developed in the geography would return 10% of profits to the public sector upon second sale of the product (i.e. to another city).

We are in ongoing discussions on the details of this with Waterfront Toronto but we think this is a unique approach to share upside value with Toronto.

You can read more on Pages 126-127 of Volume 3 (link).

To your question of a concrete example, it would be premature for us to say at this point. However, there are some innovations we believe Sidewalk Labs is uniquely suited to create for this project that could potentially apply.

One example is a “Dynamic Curb” system. This system is flexible street space that has the ability to quickly change between vehicle use (during rush-hour periods) and public space (during low-traffic periods). So the same space could become a taxi pick-up zone in the morning and evening and host food trucks or pop-up stands in the afternoon. The Dynamic Curb would help use limited street space in better ways than just reserving it for cars at all times. As a discrete system, we think the Dynamic Curb could improve streets in Toronto and many other cities around the world struggling with traffic and safety.

⇧ -1 ⇩ Share Report Save

Continue this thread →

vervglotunken 1 year ago

I am sure you have heard what is going on in Xinjiang, China. A big part of it is a developed control of the population via means of advanced technology that links identification of population and its movement within the city.

What can you say to reassure people the technology you are developing in Toronto won’t lead to anything similar?

⇧ 3 ⇩ Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(Eric here.) Running out of time so will answer broadly: In all of the technology we've proposed for Toronto Tomorrow, we've started with the goals outlined by Waterfront Toronto -- specifically, job opportunities, affordability, mobility, and sustainability. From there, we worked backwards and asked ourselves, what tools (whether digital, physical, policy, or design) can we apply to this goal to help achieve it. As you'll see in the proposal, we don't believe in technology for technology's sake. We know from a long history -- as well as current cases like the one you outline -- that technology must be applied carefully and responsibly to the urban environment, to make sure it improves people's lives.

⇧ 2 ⇩ Share Report Save

Continue this thread →

CanadianKidz90 1 year ago

great, another corporate AMA by these guys

⇧ 5 ⇩ Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

This is the last one! Take it you don’t have any more questions?

⇧ -2 ⇩ Share Report Save

ThatGuyFromCanadia 1 year ago

If this project gets axed by fear mongering I'm never gonna think the same of Torontonians.

Not sure how Torontonians can expect to achieve any societal progress when you get scared and complain about any attempt at progress (transit, politics, land development, etc the list is endless).

This is an awesome project that you guys are proposing and it's obvious you have done endless amounts of research. People will be dying to live in this community once it's built out (I have faith!).

It'll be hilarious to see the backpedaling by the same people complaining after this project further cements Toronto as Canadas best city.

⇧ 3 ⇩ Share Report Save

__-blank-__ 1 year ago

I really like the project. What’s the best way to advocate for this? Is there voting?

⇧ 0 ⇩ Share Report Save

SidewalkToronto 1 year ago

(John here.) Thanks for your interest and support! While there's no direct voting for the project, there are a number of things you can do to support the project.

First, you should engage in Waterfront Toronto's ongoing consultation in person or on-line (details here).

You can also post support in places like r/Toronto and direct readers to information you found particularly compelling, and there is an active conversation on other social media platforms which people are engaged in.

And visit our website at www.sidewalktoronto.ca to sign up for our newsletter and learn more.

I agree this project has great potential for improving affordability, sustainability, and economic opportunity in our city!

1 Share Report Save

slykethephoxenix 1 year ago

You guys get a lot of hate from the community. I just want to thank you for reaching out. Ignore the haters who just hate because of misguided ideas and keep going.

1 Share Report Save

Magikarp-Army 1 year ago

Yeah I don't really get downvotes. Voting should be to foster discussion not to indicate that "I agree with this comment" or "I disagree with this comment"

2 Share Report Save

nwrldvw -3 points · 1 year ago 0 children

More posts from the toronto community

Continue browsing in r/toronto →